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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 OMB-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
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R 251221Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
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CALCUTTA 694 FOLLOWS. SENT TO NEW DELHI FOR ACTION ON 25 APR 78.
BEING RPT FOR YOUR ACT/INFO.

QUOTE

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E.O. 11652: NA
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJECT: UPCOMING PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS AND THE TRIBULATIONS
OF THE WEST BENGAL JANATA PARTY

REF: 77 CALCUTTA A-22

1. ON JUNE 4 ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD IN WEST BENGAL
TO CHOOSE SIMULTANEOUSLY NEW VILLAGE COUNCILS (PANCHAYATS),
BLOCK PANCHAYATS AND ZILLA PARISHAD AT THE DISTRICT
LEVEL. THE REVIVAL OF THESE APPARENTLY MORIBUND GRASSROOT
STRUCTURES (THE LAST ELECTIONS WERE HELD TO THEM IN THE
SIXTIES) IS AN IMPORTANT POLITICAL PROJECT OF THE LEFT
FRONT GOVERNMENT. ITS GOALS, LEFT FRONT COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN
PROMODE DAS GUPTA SAYS, IS TO INCREASE THE INVOLVEMENT
IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND THE SENSE OF INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY
AND SOCIAL RESPONSIVENESS OF THE STATE'S IMMENSE VILLAGE
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POPULATION. THIS IN TURN IS A STEP TOWARD "STRIKING AT THE
VESTED INTRESTS " IN THE RURAL AREAS. REVIVAL OF THE
PANCHAYATS, OF COURSE IS ALSO A DIRECTLY POLITICAL MOVE TO
INCREASE THE INFLUENCE AT THE VILLAGE AND LOCAL LEVEL OF
THE CPM'S OWN PEOPLE BY GIVING THEM A NEW STRUCTURE
THROUGH WHICH TO WORK. ALTHOUGH THERE IS NOW SOME
JOCKYING GOING ON FOR PANCHAYAT CANDIDACIES BETWEEN

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THE CPM AND ITS PARTNERS IN THE FRONT (THE FORWARD
BLOC AND THE RSP) IT IS CONSIDERED A REALISTIC
ASSUMPTION THAT THE CPM AND ITS AFFILIATED ORGANIZATIONS
CAN DOMINATE THE PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS WHICH THEY HAVE
CALLED, AND WHICH IT APPEARS THEY HAVE PREPARED FOR
ASSIDUOUSLY.

2. NONETHELESS, THE PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS (AND THE
MUNICIPALITY ELECTIONS WHICH WILL FOLLOW THEM, PROBABLY
AFTER THE MONSOON) REPRESENT A CHALLENGE TO THE
OPPOSITION PARTIES IN THE STATE. THE JANATA PARTY'S
STATE CHAIRMAN P.C. SEN HAS BEEN BY FAR THE OPPOSITION
LEADER THE MOST EAGER TO TAKE UP THE CHALLENGE, IF NOT

THE ONLY ONE. HE HAS LONG BEEN ADVOCATING THAT THE
PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS BE HELD ON A NON-PARTISAN BASIS,
BY WHICH HE HAS MEANT THAT ALL THE NON-LEFT FRONT PARTIES
SHOULD UNITE AGAINST THE LEFT FRONT CANDIDATES. ALTHOUGH
IT HAS BEEN CLEAR FROM THE BEGINNING THAT THE FRONT
CANDIDATES COULD AND WOULD USE FRONT OR PARTY SYMBOLS,
SEN HAS CLUNG TO THE NOTION THAT JANATA AND CONGRESS
CANDIDATES SHOULD RUN AS IF THEY HAD NO PARTY
AFFILIATION.

3. THE CENTRAL PROBLEM FOR THE WEST BENGAL JANATA
FOR MONTSH HAS BEEN WHETERH P.C. SEN AND HIS ALL-OUT
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ANTI-LEFT FRONT POLICY SHOULD PREVAIL. THIS QUESTION IS
NOW FORMULATED AS WHETHER OR NOT JANATA CANDIDATES
SHOULD RUN IN THE PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS WITHOUT
THE PARTY SYMBOL, AS SEN DESIRES AS PART OF
HIS "NON-PARTISAN" CONCEPTION OF THE ELECTION.
ALTERNATIVELY, SEN'S OPPONENTS WITHIN THE STATE JANATA URGE
THAT JANATA PANCHAYAT NOMINEES SHOULD RUN WITH THEIR PARTY
SYMBOL. THIS MEANS BOTH ACCEPTING THE GOVERNMENT'S CONCEPTION
OF THE ELECTION AS A VNORMALLY PARTISAN ONE, AND ALSO THAT
THE JANATA WOULD DROP ITS COMMON FRONT AGAINST THE LEFT FRONT,
AND EXPECT THAT CONGRESS(I) AND (R) CANDIDATES WOULD ALSO
COMPETE (WITH THEIR SYMBOLS) ALONG WITNKJANATA AND LEFT
FRONT CANDIDATES, FOR INDIVIDUAL PANCHAYAT SEATS.

4. WE ARE NOW IN THE LAST DAYS OF CHOOSING CAFDIDATES
AND FINALIZING THE PROCEDURES FOR THE EARLY JUNE ELECTIONS.
P.C. SEN'S PRINCIPAL ANTAGONIST IN THE WEST BENGAL JANATA,
FORMER SOCIALIST BIMAN MITRA AGREED WITH THE GOWB
ELECTION AUTHORITIES THAT THE JANATA WOULD USE ITS PARTY
SYMBOL IN THE ELECTION. UPON HEARING THIS CHAIRMAN
SEN SUSPENDED MITRA, BUT CHANDRASHEKHAR, ONE OF SEN'S
DELHI ADVERSARIES INDICATED TO HIM THAT THE

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CENTRAL JANATA LEADERSHIP HAD DECIDED TO QUESTION,
RATHER THAN TO ENDORSE, SEN'S SUSPENSION OF MITRA.
THEREUPON SEN RESIGNED (ONCE AGAIN-HE WAS IN
"RESIGNED" STATUS MOST OF THE LATE FALL AND EARLY
WINTER) AS STATE PARTY CHAIRMAN AND AS A JANATA MEMBER.
IT MAY BE THAT CHANDRASHEKHAR MORE OR LESS SIMULTANEOUSLY
SUSPENDED HIM. THIS MORNING'S PAPERS HAVE SEN DECLINGING AN
INVITATION TO MEET WITH PRIME MINISTER DESAI AND
ANNOUNCING THAT HE WILL FORM A NEW PARTY IN THE STATE,
POSSIBLY TO BE KNOWN AS THE JANATA SANGHA, SINCE THE
NATIONAL JANATA LEADERSHIP HAS TURNED THE REGULAR STATE
PARTY VOVER TO HIS RIVALS.

5. COMMENT: THE SEVERE, NOT TO SAY PATHETIC, PROBLEMS
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OF THE WEST BENGAL JANTA WOULD SEEM TO BE RATHER
DISTINCT, AND UNCONNECTED WITH THE PARTY'S DIFFICULTIES
AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL. THE LINES OF BATTLE IN THE
CURRENT EPISODE ARE ESSENTIALLY UNCHAGED FROM THOSE
DESCRIBED IN OUR A-22 OF LAST DECEMBER. HOWEVER, IT
COULD PROVE THAT IN THE INTERVENING MONTHS THE NATIONAL
LEADERSHIP HAS SUFFICIENTLY LOST PATIENCE WITH SEN SO
THAT THIS WILL IN FACT BE HIS EXIT FROM THE STATE
PARTY SCENE. NO MATTER HOW MANY CURRENTLY FAMILIAR
FACES HE TAKES AWAY WITH HIM, HIS DEPARTURE WOULD SEEM
TO BE A GAIN FOR THE LOCAL JANATA. IT COULD THEN
BEGIN, ALBEIT, WITH VERY LITTLE TO WORK WITH, THE LONG
TASK OF REDEFINING THE PARTY HERE AND REBUILDING.
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